



Tribune Photo by Ovie Carter

Dennis Tully, a Metropolitan Sanitary District employee, takes a sample of the foul-smelling "gook" in lagoons near Kensington and Cottage Grove. Officials are analyzing wastes that were dumped illegally at the site.

Midnight waste dumper sought

By Casey Bukro
and Lynn Emmerman

A "MIDNIGHT DUMPER" who illegally disposed of hazardous wastes in the Calumet Harbor region was being sought Monday by Sanitary District officials who described the case as the worst in recent history.

At the same time, district officials called a top level meeting Wednesday with federal, state, and city environment officials to map plans for disposing of the wastes, which are considered poisonous and flammable. The meeting will be held in the district

offices.

Stanley Whitebloom, the district's pollution control chief for the Sanitary District, said, investigators are probing a landfill operator with a history of illegally dumping dangerous chemicals in three South Side sites.

The operator, Steven Martell, previously owned and operated U.S. Scrap Corp., located at 119th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, the site where the dangerous wastes were found, Whitebloom said.

STATE AND LOCAL agencies forced Martell to close the dump site in 1976. Two more of Martell's dump

sites also were ordered to close because he accepted toxic chemicals without a permit to do so.

Martell now is president of Paxton Landfill Corp., 12201 S. Oglesby Av., one of three dump sites in Chicago permitted to accept industrial wastes, according to Whitebloom.

"Nothing in the law tells us to look into a permit applicant's background when considering his application," Whitebloom said.

Sanitary district officials believe that in addition to the wastes already discovered, "hundreds of additional

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drums of chemicals" may be buried just north of the lagoons where the worst hazardous waste dump was found, Whitebloom said.

"If we find the additional drums, I would have to presume they are Martell's," said Whitebloom. "According to our information, they were buried years ago, when U.S. Scrap Corp. operated on the site."

The wastes, which were found in two abandoned sites in the Calumet Harbor region on Chicago's far South Side, include 500 drums of paints and acids; a black, foul-smelling liquid in lagoons; and 113,000 gallons of liquid wastes in two abandoned grain silos.

"We've never found anything this bad," said Whitebloom.

THE FIRST SITE covers six acres near Kensington and Cottage Grove avenues, a heavily industrialized area. Formerly operated by the U.S. Scrap Corp., the site was cleaned of debris under court order in 1977 and abandoned.

Since that time, said James Dencek, the district's supervisor of field operations, somebody has been coming to the abandoned site in the dead of night and dumping the wastes.

"This is a great place for a midnight dumper and the liquid waste pirates," Dencek said. The "pirates" are haulers who break the law by disposing of wastes in unsafe places, often after accepting a fee to haul it to a legitimate disposal area, Dencek said.

"THEY'RE PROBABLY dumping

something that legitimate landfills won't take," Dencek added.

Aside from the 500 barrels, district investigators also found 13,000 gallons of acidic wastes that had been pumped into a grain silo on the property. Tests are being conducted to identify the waste.

"There's no doubt that this is a hazardous situation," said Dencek as district workers combed through the drums, looking for identifying markings that would indicate their origins.

Early tests show that the wastes include strong acids and poisonous metal plating wastes. Dencek pointed out that neighborhood children could reach the site easily by crossing railroad tracks. A housing development is nearby.

ILLEGAL WASTE disposal also was discovered in the underground vaults of another abandoned grain silo about a mile east of the U.S. Scrap site. Penn Central now owns the land.

The underground vaults were found to contain about 100,000 gallons of liquid wastes about eight feet deep.

Dencek believes that tank trucks carrying up to 10,000 gallons of wastes are being driven to the abandoned silos. Then they can be pumped empty by throwing a hose into an open hatch or window.

Waste haulers who carelessly mix industrial wastes risk producing solutions that are explosive or give off poisonous fumes, Dencek said.

Both sites border the district's Calumet treatment plant, and were discovered harboring the illegal wastes during routine investigations. Both sites were known to be pollution-free in 1977.

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